

4.3 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section describes the agricultural resources in the vicinity of the Project, including prime agricultural land, unique farmland, Williamson Act contracts, and farmland of statewide importance. Potential Project-related impacts on these and other agricultural resources are analyzed.

4.3.1 Environmental Setting

A summary of all land uses traversed by the Project is presented in Section 4.12. The acreage of rangeland and cultivated cropland that would be disturbed by construction and operation of the Project is provided in Table 4.3-1. The existing El Paso Line 1903 traverses 257.5 miles of rangeland and 25.4 miles of cultivated cropland land. The proposed Cadiz Lateral would traverse 6.4 miles of rangeland and no cultivated cropland. Land use types affected of the Project are further classified as temporary disturbance (construction) and permanent disturbance (operation). Table 4.3-2 quantifies agricultural lands traversed by county.

Table 4.3-1. Summary of Agricultural Lands (by Project Component) Affected by Construction and Operation of Line 1903 and Cadiz Lateral

Project Component	Rangeland ²		Cultivated Cropland		Total Project ³	
	Temporary Construction Disturbance (acres) ⁴	Permanent Operation Disturbance (acres)	Temporary Construction Disturbance (acres) ⁴	Permanent Operation Disturbance (acres)	Temporary Construction Disturbance (acres) ⁴	Permanent Operation Disturbance (acres)
Pipeline ROW	140.59	36.89	2.76	0.00	176.32	38.79
Additional Temporary work space	0.00 ⁵	0.00	0.00 ⁵	0.00	0.00 ⁵	0.00
Above-ground facilities ⁷	24.37 ⁶	1.79	11.94 ⁶	1.49	40.80 ⁶	8.28
TOTAL³	164.96	38.68	14.7	1.49	217.12	47.07

Notes:

¹ROW = Right-of-way.

²The rangeland land use includes seven different natural vegetation cover types.

³Discrepancies in total values are due to rounding.

⁴This table lists the acreage proposed for temporary construction disturbance.

⁵Additional temporary work space is included in pipeline ROW acreage. No additional temporary work space for the Project is located off the pipeline ROW.

⁶The aboveground facilities are located within the pipeline ROW; therefore, temporary construction disturbance for aboveground facilities is accounted for in the Pipeline ROW totals in the row above. Permanent operation disturbance would occur only for new permanent aboveground facilities and evaporation pond creation.

⁷The total permanent disturbance for aboveground facilities includes the two Project evaporation ponds, although these sites are not technically aboveground facilities. The total aboveground facility permanent disturbance acreage without these ponds is only 3.46 acres.

Table 4.3-2. Summary of Agricultural Lands (by County) Affected by Construction of Line 1903 and Cadiz Lateral

County	Rangeland (acres)^{2,3}	Cultivated Cropland (acres)²	Total (acres)^{2,4}
Kern County	25.49	6.43	42.69
San Bernardino County	126.37	0.00	153.75
Riverside County	13.1	2.07	14.48
La Paz County	0	6.2	6.2
TOTAL⁴	164.96	14.70	217.12

Notes:

ROW = Right-of-way

¹ ROW = Right-of-way

²This table lists the acreage proposed for temporary construction disturbance.

³The rangeland land use includes seven different natural vegetation cover types.

⁴Discrepancies in total values are due to rounding.

Rangeland is the predominant land use along the existing El Paso Line 1903. Livestock grazing is one of the major uses of rangeland in the Project area. A grazing allotment generally consists of Federal rangelands but may also include intermingled parcels of private lands. The pipeline crosses through the Stoddard Mountain grazing allotment managed by the BLM. Livestock grazing has been and continues to be a significant use of renewable resources on public lands in the California Desert. As of 1999, 4.5 million acres (36 percent of public lands in CDCA) in 54 grazing allotments are being leased to cattle and sheep interests. Sheep grazing is generally intermittent, while use by cattle may be continuous or intermittent, depending on the locality and type of ranching operation, as well as the pattern of annual rainfall. The Stoddard Mountains grazing allotment is 170,126 acres of inactive ephemeral sheep allotment; BLM has no concerns pertaining to the Project crossing this allotment.

Cultivated croplands are irrigated and used to grow wheat, alfalfa, potatoes, cotton, pistachios, mineolas (a grapefruit/tangerine cross), and grapes.

No land identified by the California Department of Conservation (CDC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance would be traversed by the pipeline. In addition, the pipeline would not traverse land under a Williamson Act contract. The Williamson Act enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowner for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments that are much lower than normal.

4.3.2 Regulatory Setting

Federal

The Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 recognize livestock grazing as a principal use for the production of food and fiber. The BLM manages livestock grazing through 54 grazing allotments that are leased to cattle and sheep interests. The goals of the Livestock Grazing Element of the CDCA Plan are:

- (1) use range management to maintain or improve vegetation to meet livestock needs and to meet other management objectives set forth in the Plan;
- (2) continue the use of the California Desert for livestock production to contribute to satisfying the need for food and fiber from public land; and
- (3) maintain good and excellent range condition and improve poor and fair range condition class, through development and implementation of feasible grazing systems or Allotment Management Plans (AMPs). Adjust livestock use where monitoring data indicate changes are necessary to meet resource objectives.

State

Programs applicable to agricultural resources include the California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act and the CDC Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The Williamson Act authorizes preservation of agricultural lands and open space. A landowner enters into a contract, agreeing to protect the land's open space or agricultural values in order to receive reduced property taxes. The CDC Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program identifies and designates lands that are prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance.

Local

Riverside, San Bernardino, and Kern Counties all have land use designations and zoning ordinances that seek to preserve prime agricultural lands from urban encroachment. The pipeline traverses lands that are zoned for agriculture in all three counties.

In Riverside County the Agriculture land use designation has been established to help conserve productive agricultural lands within the County. It is the County's policy to protect agricultural uses, including those with industrial characteristics by discouraging inappropriate land division in the immediate proximity and allowing only uses and intensities that are compatible with agriculture uses.

The purposes of the Agriculture land use designation in San Bernardino County are as follows.

- a) to recognize commercial agriculture as a desirable land use type and a major segment of the County's economic base;
- b) to identify areas where agriculture is the primary land use but where other secondary uses which are in direct support of agricultural uses may be permitted;
- c) to preserve the agricultural base of the County economy and encourage the open space values of these uses;
- d) to provide areas for both intensive and extensive agricultural pursuits; and
- e) to identify areas of commercial (prime and non-prime) agricultural soils and operations.

The intended use area for commercial agricultural operations, agriculture support services, rural residential uses and similar and compatible uses. Open space and recreation uses may occur on non-farmed lands within this district.

Kern County has lands designated for Intensive Agriculture use and Extensive Agriculture use. Intensive Agriculture areas are devoted to the production of irrigated crops or having a potential for such use. Other agricultural uses, while not directly dependent on irrigation for production, may also be consistent with the intensive agriculture designation. Permitted uses would include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Irrigated cropland, orchards, vineyards, horse ranches, raising of nursery stock ornamental flowers and Christmas trees, fish farms, bee keeping, farm facilities,

related use; one single-family dwelling unit, cattle feed yards, dairies, dry land farming, livestock grazing, water storage, groundwater recharge acres, mineral, aggregate, and petroleum exploration and extraction, hunting clubs, wildlife preserves, farm labor housing, public utility uses, and agricultural industries pursuant to provisions of the Kern County Zoning Ordinance, and land within development areas subject to significant physical constraints.

Extensive Agriculture uses involve large amounts of land with relatively low value-per-acre yields, such as livestock grazing, dry land farming, and woodlands. Permitted uses would include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Livestock grazing, dry land farming, ranching facilities, wildlife and botanical preserves, and timber harvesting; one single-family dwelling unit, irrigated croplands, water storage or groundwater recharge areas, mineral, aggregate, and petroleum exploration and extraction, and recreation activities, such as gun clubs and guest ranches, and land within development areas subject to significant physical constraints.

4.3.3 Significance Criteria

An adverse impact on agricultural resources was considered significant and would require mitigation if Project construction or operation would:

- convert prime agricultural land, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance to non-agricultural use;
- conflict with existing land use plans, policies, or regulations for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract; or
- involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use.

Impact Analysis and Mitigation

Impact AGR-1: Temporary Loss of Rangelands or Income

Project construction could adversely affect rangelands. (Potentially Significant, Class II).

Construction of the Project could impact rangelands through the loss of the carrying capacity, damaging or removing fences or their natural barriers used for livestock control, and trapping or harming livestock that enter into the construction work area.

Construction activities would temporarily remove 164.96 acres from production of rangeland. Impacts to rangeland carrying capacity and loss of livestock could result in the loss of income. These impacts would be potentially significant (Class II).

Mitigation Measure for Impact AGR-1: Temporary Loss of Rangelands or Income

MM AGR-1a. *Regrade and Restore.* *EPNG would regrade and restore lands back to their previous condition.*

MM AGR-1b. *Livestock Control.* *Each fence crossed would be braced and secured before cutting the opening needed for construction to prevent slacking of the wire. The created opening would be closed by temporary gates as necessary to prevent passage of livestock. All damaged livestock fences, gates, cattleguards, and brace panels would be repaired or replaced to land owners standards.*

MM AGR-1c. *Livestock Safety.* *Temporary fencing would be installed as required to prevent livestock entry into the construction work area.*

MM AGR-1d. *Compensation to Land Owners.* *Prior to the start of construction, EPNG would enter into an agreement with each land owner and/or farmer, as appropriate, to provide fair compensation for the loss of income from cultivation of land taken out of production or harm to livestock due to pipeline construction.*

Impact AGR-2: Temporary Loss of Agricultural Land or Income

Construction impacts to agricultural land could result in loss of topsoil and/or farming income (Potentially Significant, Class II).

Construction activities in agricultural land would temporarily remove 14.7 acres from production. EPNG's ROW agents would coordinate construction activities with property owners and tenant farmers to minimize impacts to farming operations. Impacts to agricultural operations could result in the loss of farming income. These impacts would be potentially significant (Class II).

MM AGR-2. *Topsoil Preservation.* *EPNG would set aside at least eight inches of topsoil removed during pipeline construction on agricultural lands and preserve it for replacement and restoration to its prior location after construction for continued agricultural use.*

Impact AGR-3: Interruption of Irrigation.

Construction activities could damage or interrupt irrigation reducing crop yield (Potentially Significant, Class II).

Several activities could damage or interrupt irrigation during construction, including trenching, grading, stringing, welding, and backfilling. If the flow of irrigation water is disrupted for a prolonged period, crops could be damaged and crop yields reduced. These impacts would be potentially significant (Class II).

MM AGR-3a. *Maintain Flow.* *EPNG would maintain the flow of irrigation systems or coordinate the temporary shutoff of systems with affected landowners or tenants.*

MM AGR-3b. *Repair Damage to Systems.* *Disturbed drainage furrows, water piping, or heads would be restored, repaired, or replaced as soon as possible and monitored for problems after construction is completed. EPNG would communicate with landowners or tenants following construction and restoration to ensure the irrigation systems are functioning properly. Additional repair or remedial work would be performed if requested by the landowner. EPNG would also coordinate with the landowner to assess*

crop productivity for a period of at least 2 years, and provide compensation where crop yields show decline.

MM AGR-3c. *Limit Construction Time.* *Where pivot irrigation is active, EPNG would complete construction and restoration within a maximum 7-day period.*

Impact AGR-4. Permanent Loss of Agricultural Land or Income

Permanent conversion of irrigated agricultural lands (Potentially Significant, Class II).

The operation of the Project would permanently covert 1.49 acres of irrigated agricultural lands and 1.79 of rangelands to industrial use as aboveground facilities. An additional 36.89 acres of rangeland would be maintained as permanent ROW, but allowed to retreat back to rangeland following construction. This impact would be potentially significant (Class II).

An additional 36.89 acres of rangeland would be maintained as permanent ROW, but allowed to revert back to rangeland following construction.

MM AGR-4. *Compensation to Landowners.* *EPNG would negotiate compensation with the landowner(s) for portions of fields that would be taken out of production.*

Rationale for Mitigation. Construction activities could significantly impact agricultural lands and rangelands by impacting topsoil, removing crops and native vegetation, interfering with livestock and interfering with farming operations. Mitigation measures AGR-1a through AGR-3c would ensure that damage to agricultural and rangelands are avoided where possible and if not avoided, repaired and/or restored. Where agricultural lands and rangelands are permanently taken out of production, landowners would be compensated. Due to the small amount of acreage of irrigated lands and rangelands taken out of permanent production, no significant impact would occur at a County level.

Table 4.3-3 presents a summary of impacts on agricultural resources and recommended mitigation measures.

Table 4.3-3. Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Agricultural Resources

Impact	Mitigation Measure
AGR-1: Temporary Loss of Rangelands or Income	AGR-1a. Regrade and Restore AGR-1b. Livestock Control AGR-1c. Livestock Safety AGR-1d. Compensation to Landowners
AGR-2: Temporary Loss of Agricultural Land or Income	AGR-2. Topsoil Preservation
AGR-3: Interruption of Irrigation	AGR-3a. Maintain Flow AGR-3b. Repair Damage to Systems AGR-3c. Limit Construction Time
AGR-4: Permanent Loss of Agricultural Land or Income	AGR-4. Compensation to Landowners

4.3.4 Cumulative Impacts

In addition to the proposed Project, other projects may contribute to cumulative impacts on agricultural resources in the vicinity of the Project. The cumulative acreage permanently taken out of production is significantly less than one percent of the county's agricultural acreage. Consequently, the cumulative impacts on agricultural resources would be less than significant.

4.3.5 Alternatives

No Project Alternative

The No Project Alternative would not convert the former All American crude oil pipeline system to a natural gas transmission system. No new construction activities would impact agricultural resources along the existing line.

Ehrenberg to Daggett Alternative

The Ehrenberg to Daggett Alternative would not convert the portion of Line 1903 from MP 0 to MP 132.1. The 0.98- acre of agricultural land near Wheeler Ridge would not be permanently disturbed under this alternative, and there would be less disturbance of rangeland in the Mojave Desert. Under the Ehrenberg to Daggett Alternative, the impact on 8.09 acres and permanent impact on 0.51 acres of cropland near Blythe, and Ehrenberg would be the same as described for the Project.

Ehrenberg to Cadiz Alternative

The Ehrenberg to Cadiz Alternative would not convert the portion of Line 1903 from MP 0 to MP 215.75. The 0.98 acre of agricultural land near Wheeler Ridge would not be permanently disturbed under this alternative, and there would be less disturbance of rangeland in the Mojave Desert. Under the Ehrenberg to Cadiz Alternative, the impact on 8.09 acres of cropland near Blythe and Ehrenberg would be the same as described for the Project.

4.3.6 References

Nelson, H. 2001. Personal communication between H. Nelson, Kern County Planning Department and D. Richardson, ENSR. November 30, 2001.